

SCIENCE AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

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In the last thirty years it has become increasingly established that illnesses of mind and body can be caused by psychological influences and can be treated by psychological methods. Such cases have occurred often enough to be *statistically significant* and observations could be *repeated experimentally* in hospital or laboratory. "Spiritual healing" is not recognized on the same basis; these two criteria have not been met. It is my opinion that they will never be met, because scientific predictability is incompatible with the freedom of the spirit. Scientific evidence for the spirit is historical, not experimental. Even less acceptable to most scientists is the claim that healing can be effected without direct contact with the patient, as in intercessory prayer. Such claims are regarded as due to coincidence. This is in spite of the fact that two main features of spiritual healing: unusual behavior of matter, and communication without physical means of transmission, have been proven possible according to the most exacting scientific standards.

As to the concept of matter, its apparent solidity has proven to be an illusion of our sense-organs. Not only is the solidity of objects an illusion, but also the idea that the electronic pattern behind it is maintained by a rigid law of nature. Individual electrons behave unpredictably. Only in large numbers of atoms do we find the so-called regularity of natural law. A whole philosophy of absolute fatalism had been developed on the basis of these regularities until physicists found that they were of a statistical nature only. The book you now hold could, without

violation of any "law of nature," dissolve and its electrons change into a pattern allowing it to fall through the empty spaces composing your hand or desk, like salt running from a shaker. The probability of such an event is small, but by no means infinitesimal. Could not something like this describe the apparently miraculous disappearance of a cancer? Medicine has for some time known that psychological circumstances of such cures have not been investigated. Such research is now under way.

This suggests that "spiritual healing" fits into the general concept developed by psychosomatic medicine: that bodily diseases express specific psychological conditions and that they disappear if the underlying condition disappears spontaneously or by treatment. With this, "spiritual healing" agrees; it also agrees with the experience of medical psychotherapy as to the importance of the total individual situation. Here, unlike surgery or routine drug medicine, personalities of healer and healed are decisive factors, and the claim that a person can be healed without knowledge that efforts have been made on his behalf has been established by the meticulous case-work of many.

Almost all physicians have encountered sad cases of curable diseases becoming fatal while under some form of spiritual treatment. The physician must insist that spiritual healing is not a substitute for, but an adjunct of, medical therapy. The general skepticism as to spiritual healing is based upon a materialistic and anthropocentric view of life. Until Planck and Einstein revolutionized physics, Western scientists held that everything in the material world was governed by immutable deterministic law; each future illness would be cured by a specific remedy. Even psychoanalytic therapy began under this impression. The role of the scientific magician is so flattering that many physicians and scientists still cling to it, though it has become scientifically untenable. The increasing spiritual insecurity of modern man has ministered to this, since it

has made him increasingly dependent upon bodily and economic security.

The scientist bombarding the atom could not foresee the atomic bomb. Yet it is not an irrational accident, that the scientist wielding destructive powers against atoms produced also destructive weapons against men. Modern science is based on the assumption that man knows good and evil and is the ultimate authority on the use of his own powers. On the contrary, the basis of spiritual healing is recognition of higher powers which transcend the human mind.

Medical treatment of illness must include concern with the spiritual condition of the patient. Spiritual influences underlie all the therapeutic methods recognized by scientific medicine. To understand man we need not only medicine, philosophy and law. We need theology, too.